

APPROACH IS RIGHT BUT NOT THE FINISH

WARM PRAISE from Wrexham manager Arfon Griffiths was cold comfort for Town supporters who had to stand and suffer in appalling conditions in North Wales and see their favourites take their worst defeat of the season so far.

The two sides were evenly matched in all departments bar the one that matters most, and Wrexham deserved to win through their ability to take three of the 16 chances they made.

The Town struck for goal 15 times and found the net only once, although they ought to have had a penalty, and were out of luck when a late drive by Tony Grealish hit the bar.

The weather had a major impact on the match, with the Town set to face an icy gale in the first half.

Short passing on the ground was the only way to make progress against it, but the Town contributed to their own difficulties after doing some nice work in approach.

Brian Stein laid on a chance for Bob Hatton, who shot weakly at Dai Davies, and when Hatton returned the gesture Stein sent a volley narrowly over the bar.

It took Wrexham 15 minutes to get in their first shot, but they made it count. A cross by Les Cartwright was cleared to Alan Dwyer, and his drive from the edge of the penalty area was answered by a diving save from Jake Findlay.

Dwyer's shot was probably worth a goal for its power and accuracy, but the ball rebounded off Findlay and Dixie McNeil carefully steered his shot into the net.

There was plenty of competitive action to admire at both ends, with two good midfielders battling for supremacy, and although David Moss rarely came into the action, one tricky

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN

run should have brought a goal.

He was beating Terry Darracott on the by-line, and the linesman spotted Darracott pulling Moss's shirt. He flagged, and we looked forward to the penalty as referee Callow blew up. Moss and Darracott were at least three yards inside the penalty area when the flag was raised, but the kick was given a yard outside.

The biggest difference between the sides was that Mike Saxby was having the day's hardest job in holding gangling Ian Edwards, and early in the second half the centre-half had to go off for five minutes after twisting his ankle.

He was badly missed, but Findlay produced a good save to keep out a shot by Mick Vinter, and it was ironical that the killer goal came shortly after the limping Saxby had returned, in the 61st minute.

STRANGE

"We lost our discipline because of the injury," said Town boss David Pleat later, and certainly the second goal was a strange affair.

It started with a corner which Findlay pushed away. The goalkeeper, always a dominating figure in his penalty area, tried to complete the save by following the ball to somewhere near the penalty spot, lost it, and was left in no man's land as the ball ran free to Steve Fox, about 25 yards from goal.

His accurate chip deserves credit. He summed



up the position quickly, and left Findlay stranded. Grealish, West and Saxby were all guarding the line behind the goalkeeper, but the ball was well over head high as it went into the net just under the bar.

The Town managed to settle down after that reverse, and Ricky Hill and Moss both forced Davies to work hard for his wages, but a mistake by Kirk Stephens finished the contest.

His poor pass in the 75th minute left the flank exposed. Frank Carrodus, on his debut after an £80,000 move from Aston Villa, carried the ball quickly down Wrexham's left wing, and crossed accurately for Edwards to score from close range.

Five minutes later Saxby was at last allowed to leave for more treatment, having also collected a booking for a foul on Edwards.

Three down, the Town kept going to the bitter end, and after Paul Price had seen a shot tipped over the bar Bob Hatton scored in the 83rd minute after Davies had been unable to hold a stinging drive by Stephens.

In the final minute Grealish cracked a 25-yard thunderbolt at goal which left Davies helpless, but hit the bar.

With Wrexham's attack usually looking more menacing than the Town's, I thought they just about deserved to win.

Match Details

WREXHAM 3, LUTON TOWN 1
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby (Aizlewood, 80 mins), Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss.

WREXHAM: Davies; Darracott, Dwyer, Davis (Sutton, 75 mins), Jones; Fox, Carrodus, McNeil; Vinter, Edwards, Cartwright.

THE GOALS: Dixie McNeil, 15 minutes, from the rebound after Jake Findlay did well to save Alan Dwyer's shot; Steve Fox, 61 minutes, brilliant chip as Findlay advanced out of goal; Ian Edwards, 75 minutes, after left-wing run by debut boy Frank Carrodus; Bob Hatton for the Town, 83 minutes, after shot by Kirk Stephens was too hot for Dai Davies to hold.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved, six off target and one hit the bar; Wrexham seven saved and six off target.

ENTERTAINMENT: Surprisingly good in bitterly cold and windy conditions.

ATTENDANCE: 9,145, with the home fans happier than the loyal away following.

REFEREE: Victor Callow, Solihull—stopped the game too often to give free-kicks when the innocent parties wanted to play on, frustrating players and spectators.

BOOKINGS: Alan Dwyer and Steve Fox for dissent; Mike Saxby, his third yellow card of the season, for allegedly persistently fouling Ian Edwards, who was backing into the defender most times.